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ABSTRACT

In September 2000, grantmakers from around the country traveled to three Nebraska communities--Albion, Crete, and Henderson--to see how community-based education can positively affect the economic, environmental, and cultural development of a rural community. In Albion, the school is an open laboratory in which students, teachers, and parents work together to preserve the culture, environment, and quality of life cherished by residents of this remote Nebraska community. Community-based education in Henderson reflects the Mennonite faith central to its history and builds upon a spirit of cooperation that is the cornerstone of this community's successes. Henderson kept its school in the community by merging with a neighboring school system and developed cooperatively-owned telecommunications and recycling businesses that operate in a number of rural communities. in Crete, community-based education resulted in a new one-stop, multiple services facility that grew out of a partnership of local government, the school, businesses, and philanthropy. Three lessons were learned from the trip. The community school is vital to the survival of rural communities, not only for teaching positive values and cherishing a vanishing way of life, but also for helping the community focus on intergenerational communication that leads to leadership development and potential retention of youth. The community school can be an incubator for small business development. Youth and the community learn the values of collaboration, cooperation, and communication through community-based education. (TD)

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RURAL CASE STUDIES

COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION and RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural Funders Working Group Case Study No.2

Site Visit to Nebraska
September 2000

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By Carol Lee Doeden

NFG Neighborhood Funders Group

January 2001

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ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDERS GROUP

Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) began in 1980 as an informal network of funders interested in the grantmaking issues of neighborhoods. The organization is primarily concerned with expanding support for the efforts of low and moderate-income residents to improve their neighborhoods and communities.

NFG represents the belief that residents are empowered through neighborhood organizations to identify significant issues, to develop leaders, and to implement creative and appropriate solutions. Support for neighborhoods with few resources and little influence can provide a more equitable environment for strengthening communities.

Membership is open to any institution whose primary activity is providing grant dollars or loans to neighborhood-based efforts. Today over 200 grantmaking organizations belong to NFG. Membership information is available online at www.nfg.org.

ABOUT THE RURAL FUNDERS WORKING GROUP

The Rural Funders Working Group seeks to increase the awareness of funding needs in rural communities and to foster greater involvement and partnership efforts in responding to the needs of rural communities. Updates on its activities are online at www.nfg.org.

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Neighborhood Funders Group
Rural Funders Working Group
Site Visit to Nebraska
September 2000

COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION and RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This case study reports on the second in a series of site visits to rural communities being organized by the Rural Funders Working Group of the Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG). NFG appreciates the time, talents and hospitality of the many Nebraskans who made this visit possible. The site visits give rural residents an opportunity to tell funders about their communities and their aspirations, and funders an opportunity to develop new grantmaking opportunities for the future. This case study and those of other rural community visits are available online at **www.nfg.org** *and will be distributed to public and private sector grantmakers nationwide to develop a broader understanding of opportunities for expanding the resource base of rural communities.*

INTRODUCTION

On September 12-14, 2000, grantmakers from around the country traveled to three Nebraska communities: Albion, Crete and Henderson, to see how community-based education can positively affect the economic, environmental and cultural development of a rural community. The School at the Center, the local host for the visit, chose these sites because together they illustrate a common theme of community-based education as a key instrument for community development in rural areas. At the same time, each community has developed a distinctive approach that reflects the diverse results community-based education can have.

In Albion, the school is an open laboratory in which students, teachers and parents work together to preserve culture, the environment and a quality of life that residents of this remote Nebraska community cherish. Community-based education in Henderson reflects the Mennonite faith central to its history and builds upon a spirit of cooperation that is the cornerstone of this community's successes. Henderson kept its school in the community through merging with a neighboring school system and developed cooperatively-owned telecommunications and waste disposal businesses operating in a number of rural communities. And in Crete, community-based education resulted in a new one-stop, multiple services facility which grew out of a partnership of local government, the school, businesses and philanthropy.

In each case, there is compelling testimony that community-based education can generate critical investments for rural economic and community development. In these towns, community-based education fostered youth leadership and development, engaging students in community planning, economic and cultural development. These young people are collaboarating with elders, advocacy groups, teachers, farmers/ranchers, bankers, civic leaders, and other residents in joint strategies for community development.

RURAL NEBRASKA AND THE PLACE OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Rural Nebraskans share many of the prevailing rural issues as the rest of the nation: the erosion of small family farms and agricultural changes, the outward migration of youth, increasing energy costs and especially, the increasing costs and supposed "inefficiency" of rural education. Two nonprofit organizations, Rural Schools and Community Trust and School at the Center, who hosted this site visit, are working to strengthen rural schools and communities in tandem. The visitors observed how three different rural towns are working to build capacity through learning about themselves, their community and heritage, and translating that into a vision for the future.

Community-based education is a vital component of rural economic development. When rural students learn to become involved in, take ownership of and make contributions to their small communities, the probability increases that the citizens they become will be adult contributors in whatever community they find themselves. Often, community involvement by students increases the chances that they will either stay in or return to a rural community to live their lives, raise their children and grow old.

Nebraska, like so many of the Plains states, has a rural agricultural economy, a few large urban areas and many small towns. Rural Nebraska communities have struggled since the advent of the tractor to maintain their populations and economic base, with mixed results. Many communities have all but disappeared. Of the communities that survive or even thrive, several factors consistently recur:

- An economic base, such as agriculture, a factory or prison, or a nearby larger city offering employment.
- Basic downtown services (grocery, restaurant, filling station, hardware store, bank)
- Updated infrastructure and available, affordable housing space
- An active civic community (with volunteer organizations willing to work together)
- ***The community's school.***

The single, consistent sign of a small, rural community's survival is retention of its school building and active school enrollment. Even in small towns where many residents live below the poverty line, an open, filled schoolhouse alone can maintain that village's existence. Yet small, rural Nebraska schools have historically borne the brunt of school funding cuts.

Funding cuts notwithstanding, rural Nebraska schools have consistently higher graduation rates than urban ones. When cost per rural graduate (as opposed to the usual cost per student) is compared with the urban schools, the cost per rural student is not radically different. Comparing the cost per pupil makes the smallest school $2,500 more expensive than the least expensive large school. However, when the cost per graduate is compared, the small schools spend approximately $1,000 more per pupil. Rural

More than half of Nebraska's public schools are in rural areas. The state has many small schools, and many small classes, but teachers aren't paid much in rural Nebraska and many schools suffer declining enrollment. Still, 64 percent of what Nebraska spends in rural schools goes for instruction, the second highest rate in the nation, and relatively few teachers are teaching out-of-field. Demographics alone make it very important that Nebraska continuously addresses rural education policy.

-- Why Rural Matters- The need for every state to take action on rural education by Elizabeth Beeson, Policy Analyst and Marty Strange, Policy Director Rural School and Community Trust

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schools are able, through small class size, parental cooperation and familiarity with every student, to bring students their full potential.

SCHOOL AT THE CENTER: STRENGTHENING THE SCHOOL AS A COMMUNITY ASSET

The School at the Center is a statewide partnership of 30 rural communities ranging in size from 140 to 5000. It involves students in the environment, culture, economics and history of their own community. Projects might include children's interviews of the community elders. The students then honor those elders, sometimes with gifts, other times with a public presentation. The newest generation learns to appreciate what prior generations have to offer. Some communities teach their children how to succeed economically, such as a fifth-grade class crafts business, or high school students' computer building and repair business. Other schools and communities involve students in preserving community history and cultural heritage. Students catalog trees and plants; clean up, paint and preserve old buildings and enhance the appearance of their communities.

As a community comes together to share ideas and make decisions on its future, its members frequently learn more about one another, their skills, abilities and assets, and what other knowledge the community needs to acquire to be vital. Obtaining the new skills and knowledge is called *capacity building*. With the necessary information, abilities and understanding, residents can create a sustainable, flexible, community that will last into the future.

School at the Center Bedrock Principles

- *Public education for the civic good requires healthy communities.*
- *When schools and communities share common beliefs, student work is meaningful public work.*
- *Public education requires healthy communities where every person has a place and where no generation stands alone.*
- *Good teaching connects learning with students and community: deprived of local meaning, teaching becomes standardized and lifeless.*
- *Rural revitalization is not just a matter of smokestack chasing.*
- *To be committed to a community means to love its history, art, architecture, folk tradition, and sense of cultural purpose.*

To build a community's capacity successfully, youth must also be included. School at the Center facilitates communities' development of a broad vision of how to help this happen, and each community is then free to refine the vision to suit its particular situation, wants and needs.

At the state level, School at the Center has partnerships with such diverse organizations as the University of Nebraska, the Rural School and Community Trust, the Nebraska Writing Project, Nebraska Rural Development Commission, Nebraska Humanities Council, Center for Rural Affairs, several Natural Resources Districts and Nebraska Resource Conservation and Development regions, Nebraska State Historical Society, Nebraska Department of Education, the Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains and the regional-based Educational Service Units.

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The Communities

Albion, Nebraska

Albion is the seat of Boone County. About 2,000 people live in the city at the southeastern edge of a finger of the Nebraska Sandhills. The town's existence relies on the railroad that slices through the community, and the 60 million bushels of grain flowing annually through the Cargill grain elevators. "A castle – a fortress in the sky," wrote one Albion teen of the elevators' height and breadth, which dominate the line of sky.

Albion's biggest challenge is the changing face of American agriculture. According to the hosts, sixth grade teacher Ellen Kohtz and superintendent Richard Stephens, many area farmers have contemplated whether or not to continue their farm operations, due to the combinations of low prices, drought, and the need to enlarge their farm operations just to stay in business. Farming's fortunes have a ripple effect on the community's economy. .

The town's other challenge has more to do with a real estate effect of location. Its 13 north-south streets and 12 east-west streets are cut off at an angle by the highway and the railroad. Trains mean survival for the agricultural community that needs a way to ship its primary products across the nation. However, because the town is more than 50 miles from Interstate 80, it has to provide its own goods, services and entertainment, or its citizens have a long way to travel to acquire them. Many area youth don't stay in Albion because of its isolation, while others return to raise their children because of the good schools and friendly community.

Albion Public Schools. The city's school houses all 12 grades. The local business community is strongly committed: each elementary class has a community business partner, involving children at every grade level in some form of community-based education. For example, intergenerational learning is a focus of third graders' regular visits to their elderly neighbors and relations at the Wolf Memorial Good Samaritan Home. Building on this theme, housing a day care facility in the nursing home is being explored.

The students' commitment to the community takes many forms. They maintain the town's Web site, **www.ci.albion.ne.us/**. In another effort, Albion School Superintendent Richard Stephens is working with the Albion Economic Council and a student group to open a student-managed theater in a closed movie theater. The Economic Council has committed to paying a projectionist's salary and Stephens is approaching groups such as Future Business Leaders of America to participate.

> "The Olson Nature Preserve is unique because of the community involvement. The people in the area came together to create something to do for youth. It's as critical to economic development as a factory."
> – Bill Whitney, President, Prairie Plains Resource Institute, Aurora

Olson Nature Preserve. This is the biggest project involving the Albion community and its school. When the Grant Olson estate bequested 77 acres of land to the Albion Public School District, the Albion Education Foundation decided to use the land as a teaching tool and a draw for visitors. It created an innovative partnership with Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI), a nonprofit organization dedicated to acquiring, preserving, maintaining and restoring ecosystems through Nebraska, freeing itself of land ownership while retaining primary stewardship of aspects of the preserve. Visitors from all over see artifacts of early inhabitants as they walk the trails cleared by high school students on their summer vacation, or look for flora and fauna catalogued by Albion high school biology classes. Children write poetry about the site, and art classes meet to gain inspiration from

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nature. Students are mapping the preserve using the latest Global Information Systems computer technology. Adult volunteer stewards work with PPRI to clean up litter, mow, help with prescribed burns and rid the area of thistles.

Boone County Historical Museum. In other preservation efforts, older youth restored a small building which housed the first gas station in Albion: it now sits on the grounds of the Boone County Historical Society and awaits restoration as a working gas station on its original location.

Technology at work. Students have worked with the Nebraska Historical Society in Lincoln to help archive exhibits which are being permanently changed or removed from public view at the museum. They traveled to Lincoln, took careful photographs and wrote descriptions of the items, then put the information on computer disks for a virtual tour of closed exhibits for the museum archives.

Community-based education in Albion has preserved the community's most important resources, its culture and its natural environment, while preparing youth to be leaders of the future. An important by-product has been the role the school has played in strengthening the bonds between youth and adults and parents and children, making the transition of leadership from one generation to the next almost seamless and giving the community hope that it can continue to retain or bring back future leaders.

Henderson, Nebraska

Henderson (motto: "Some bigger… None better.") was settled largely by a group of 35 Mennonite families who traveled to Nebraska from Russia in 1874 at the invitation of the Burlington Railroad. Although the railroad left in 1941, the small community that is Henderson has persevered.

More than 125 years later, the community of approximately 1,000 remains dominated by its largely Mennonite population. This is a community where the school is not so much at the center as it is an adjunct to the church.

> "People are as strong as the institutions in the community, such as the school, church, medical and ethnic institutions. We also have a great work ethic. Businesses thrive in this environment."
> -- Allen Jantzen, owner
> Circle 5 Cattle Feeders

A conversation with the president of one of the community's banks, a Mennonite convert, not a native, was revealing. The homogeneity of Henderson has its advantages, he reported, in that once something is decided, all work together to get it done, and all then think alike about it. Among the disadvantages are the large numbers of people who are related to one another with the natural conflicts of envy and family squabbles. There is also a strong perception that the church is central to the community, and the school comes after that.

Heartland Community Schools. Henderson and the nearby town of Bradshaw, population 450, were unified to create Heartland Community Schools. One of the landmark projects that drew the students and communities together was the making of a book, "Telling Our Stories: We Remember." Students from several different grade levels interviewed the elders of their area and recorded some of the stories.

Prior to the merger, Henderson was the first community in which School at the Center played a role. Henderson was looking for a way to tie its downtown to the school. Members of

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the school administration, church, community and the School at the Center staff brainstormed and decided to create a new staff position to help focus on economic development.

Ventures in Telecommunications and Recycling. The town formed its own cooperative telephone company in 1969, Henderson Telecom, which today offers phone, high-speed Internet access and cable services. The company serves a growing number of surrounding areas and is in the forefront of rural technology innovation. Henderson also operates a successful recycling center, which grew out of volunteer efforts in the early 1990s. Those operations recently expanded to surrounding smaller towns. Grants funds were used to purchase a glass crusher, cardboard baler, plastics grinder and loading ramp. In 1999 over 377 tons were collected and shipped. The recycling program recently expanded to surrounding small towns, where semi-trailer collection points were set up. These businesses reflect not only the community's focus on economic development, but also the strong and consistent leadership that it cultivates and which serves the working relationship of the school and community.

Immigrant House. Henderson's latest project is called Immigrant House, a future tourist attraction. Plans call for a replica of the long, narrow building the railroad constructed to house immigrant families in the 1870s. Other proposed attractions will be the train depot, a restored farmhouse, storefronts, a church and a horse barn. Fourth graders are selling booklets to raise funds for the project and there is a community-wide effort to sell Immigrant House courtyard paving bricks.

Today, Henderson boasts six churches: three varieties of Mennonite, and three Bible churches; a senior center, and a full fire station and rescue squad. Henderson recognizes it has the potential to become a bedroom community to the growing urban center at York, and its leaders are discussing ways they can capitalize on this.

Crete, Nebraska

Crete is on the edge of the Big Blue River, and the earliest parts of the town were in the flat river bottom, such that it experiences low-level flooding in very wet years. Up on the hill is the high school, and on an older hill is Doane College, a private liberal arts college run by the United Church of Christ.

Crete is more of a small suburb, a mix of urban, sub-urban and rural life. Large combines and tractors still occasionally snarl downtown traffic in Crete, but the city of 5,000 has many residents who commute 25 miles to the nearby state capitol, Lincoln, to work. Demographically, the Crete population is now 22 percent minorities, mostly Hispanics who work in one of the local factories, processing meat or grains or pet food. The college draws some students who remain to become residents of Crete, while others move on.

The Blue River Family Resource Center. In Crete, collaboration between local governments and community-based organizations was key to their successful efforts. The Blue River Family Resource Center (BRFRC), a one-stop resources center, came out of a brainstorming session at a Crete Chamber of Commerce retreat. The facility concept evolved into a partnership between the City, which owns the building; Blue River Mental Health Services, which manages the facility; Social Services, Crete Municipal Hospital and Saline County. The Blue River Family Resource Center means that there's help for residents – if a wage-earner loses a job, or a new mother needs

Building collaboration
- Get key decision-makers at the table.
- Develop ownership and buy-in of key ideas.
- Build mutual trust and respect.
- Maintain involvement, participation and equity.
- Manage internal and external conflict.

-- Rick Nation, Director
Blue Valley Community Action

child care and low-cost medical care for her baby, or a family newly arrived from another country needs a home.

Crete Public Schools are connected to this one-stop, blended-programs facility in several ways. Students participate in the daycare program, which serves full-paying Crete families, as well as those who have no or a limited ability to pay. The daycare program has a waiting list of 45 children of paying parents. The agency also acts as a resource and referral service for in-home daycare providers. The school is also involved in the SCIP (School-Community Intervention Program) in which entire families are referred and helped. The Resource Center provides Even Start and Migrant Even Start classes for young parents to get their GED and computer training to improve their employability. A mental health counselor also comes to Crete High School as part of a juvenile service team.

Technology. As part of an effort to stop the outward migration of youth, the community and the school decided to bring technology to all Crete residents who wanted it. The City of Crete worked with Crete Public Schools, Doane College, Blue Valley Community Action and the CableVision of Lincoln to create the ABC project, or "Access for a Better Crete." ABC is a demonstration project using technology to let people know what's happening in Crete and the surrounding communities. It promotes intergenerational, lifetime learning by promoting mentoring between students and the elderly. Using the Internet, participation in community affairs should increase as well as knowledge about events in Crete.

"The school came to us with the program for building computers. The hospital bought 18 of them and we could buy that many again. If we have a problem, a student arrives to help us solve it within a couple of hours. The best part is, the computers that come from the school don't have lots of programs on it that we don't want."
--Joe Lohrman,
Administrator, Crete Municipal Hospital

Cardinal Computers, an innovative high technology business, was developed by students and technology teachers with the cooperation of the community. The students learned how to build a computer and install the specific hardware the customer desires. So far, they have built computers for the hospital, the county commissioners, and are hoping to open and run a computer help desk at Doane College. It is hoped that as students work successfully in technology in their rural community, they will decide to remain there and continue that work.

Jeff Wooters, Crete Schools Technology Coordinator, explained that the school doesn't have the physical plant to build more than two computers a month. Even so, the school receives $200 of the $1200 cost for each custom-built computer. The students have also assisted in running what they refer to as "fiber" (high-speed fiber optic cable) all over the community. They are working next to extend the high-speed cables between the hospital and the medical clinic, to cut down time spent carrying medical files from place to place.

Other Crete technology goals include providing training facilities for the community so that people could hire a trained high school or college student at a reasonable rate to help on such programs as Microsoft Word or to learn how to perform mail merges. The students involved in the computer programs are amazed they can do so much in a school the size of Crete. People

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from the community stop them in the street to ask computer questions, and refer one another to the students.

Pioneer Museum. The Maples, the area's first homestead, is the focal point of Crete's Pioneer Museum. Other buildings coming to the site, including a former schoolhouse, will join the original one-story log cabin. Area schools use The Maples for a variety of activities. For example, fourth graders use locally-based curriculum to learn about Nebraska history during a Living History Day presented by eight graders.

On a day-long field trip called "Western Trails Experience," Crete school children pack and pull a replica of a "Mormon Killer" wagon which one class constructs. The groups of children trek four-and-a-half miles where real wagon ruts from the Nebraska City-Kearney Cut-Off are still visible. After cooking their own lunches in a Dutch oven, they lower their wagons down a ravine and climb out again.

Crete is a community in transition but with a great deal going for it. The concept of collaboration at Crete recognizes that the community is not homogenous. Putting the school and community-based education at the center of the Crete community's experience benefits everyone.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE NEBRASKA SITE VISIT

1. **The community school is a vital institution to the survival of rural communities – not only for teaching positive values and cherishing a vanishing way of life, but also for helping the community to focus on the importance of intergenerational communication which leads to leadership development and potential retention of youth.**

> "Site visits are important to the evaluation of any work that I do. I can read all that I want, but until I go and see a place, and build a relationship, it's not the same. Site visits bring a different dimension because I can see the whole community, see the connection of what groups do to each other. In a metropolitan community you can't know how groups affect each other, but in a small community they are more knowable. There is the potential for seeing all of it.
> I now have a point of reference for future reports and I can draw my own conclusions."
> – Teri Yeager, William Randolph Hearst Foundation, San Francisco

For a number of decades, rural schools have been moving away from being an integral part of the municipal community and towards being a community unto itself. Reconnecting school and community is important. One student from a southeast Nebraska school reported that she and other students saw the school, not the community, as their home – and then at graduation, they saw themselves thrown out of their home. Why, then should students stay where they think life is boring and they see few employment opportunities?

As in the Albion Public Schools, children can learn to have a vested interest – financial, recreational and historical, in the well-being of their community. The contact rural youth have with the elderly is priceless for respect, understanding and passing on the histories for which these communities are so often known.

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2. The community school can be an incubator for small business development.

In rural communities like Henderson, leaders are dynamic, filling various roles and demonstrating entrepreneurial spirit. Crete Schools' computer building and repairing business also teaches youth they can be successful in a small business for which there is a need. And the children of Albion learn in grade school how to bank and spend, how to create and sell, and those lessons carry over into the community.

In community-based education, the school is focused on developing an entrepreneurial edge in students, often with the cooperation and encouragement of existing businesses. This integration of school and business offers opportunities to strengthen and preserve rural communities as economically viable and sustainable for the future.

3. Youth and the community as a whole learn the values of collaboration, cooperation and communication through community-based education experiences.

One of the most important lessons from communities like Crete is that focused collaboration results when various sectors work together to achieve a specific goal. Multi-dimensional partnerships in rural communities can unify the community to focus on its most important needs and produce results that would have otherwise been difficult to achieve.

When youth are included in as many phases of collaboration as possible, adults and parents learn to respect and value the contributions of children and youth to the overall well-being of the community. As collaboration is successful, the school and the youth are included when the community plans for the future.

CONCLUSION

In rural Nebraska, people's resources are stretched to the limit, with years of bad farm prices, bad weather and/or bad harvests, and a steady exodus of youth, leaving a smaller population base to support and improve the physical and communal infrastructure. The "make it bigger" economic climate of school mergers and mega-farming leaves communities in a quandary. Too often, small communities are not thinking about economic development, just economic survival.

> "I am struck by the similarities; people are trying to build community wherever they are. Many of the issues are the same, and many of the solutions use the same strategies. In urban, suburban and rural communities, it is effective to get the youth involved, give them a voice, let them participate and give them hope."
> -- Mark Kenney, Kauffman Foundation

Rural, community-based education can be used as an effective fulcrum for community development. A small community can showcase the interconnectedness of school and community; providing an opportunity to understand that changes and improvements to the community aren't happening in isolation; an interconnectedness that is often difficult to see in a large, urban area.

Assistance in the form of small grants can make a tremendous difference to a small community. A grant of less than $5,000, according to School at the Center's Jerry Hoffman, can have a great impact. The grant encourages the community to move forward with its economic development. All three sites visited successfully use matching funds and challenge grants.

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The origins of School at the Center are deep in the farm crisis of the 1980s, and show how new and recently implemented the concept of inclusion of youth and schools in economic solutions for small towns is. With ongoing help and support from the Rural Schools and Community Trust (formerly the Annenberg Rural Challenge), School at the Center is reintroducing the critical place of the school in communities.

School at the Center helps rural communities to rebuild by introducing and bolstering community-based education. In turn, communities build and expand their own capacity, learn to encourage community input and value community relevance.

Additional Resources

- To reach leaders in the communities and schools visited and to learn more about specific initiatives, call Jerry Hoffman at 402-483-5410 or e-mail JH50022@ALLTEL.NET. Additional information about School at the Center is available online at **www.satc.unl.edu/**.
- Rural *Policy Matters* and *Rural Roots* are two publications from the Rural School and Community Trust. Information on both is available at **www.rural.edu**.

Host Committee

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- Jerry Hoffman, *President*
- Robi Kroger, *Curriculum Development*
- Chuck Karpf, *Chair*
- Margy Karpf, *Coordinator*
- Jim O'Hanlon, *Dean, Teachers College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*
- Paul Olson, *English Professor, UN-L*
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- Jack Hills
- Barbara Poore

In Albion:

- Ellen Kohtz, *Sixth Grade teacher, Albion Elementary School*
- Richard Stephens, *Superintendent, Albion Public Schools*

In Henderson:

- Shannon Siebert, *Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce/Liaison, School at the Center*
- Norm Yoder, *Superintendent, Heartland Community Schools*

In Crete:

- Kim Sheppard, *Principal, Crete High School*
- Jon Fero, *Superintendent, Crete Public Schools*

Site Visit Participants

- Jon Bailey, *Center for Rural Affairs*
- Jack Campbell, *Cooper Foundation*
- Reggi Carlson, *Heartland Center for Leadership Development*
- Mollie Hale Carter, *Star A, Inc.*
- Molly Fisher, *Nebraska Humanities Council*
- Sherrill Hampton, *Hampton Consulting Group, Inc.*
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